TO: Alison Byerly, Acting Provost
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cc: International Committee

FROM: Ad hoc Committee on Middle East Studies (Jeff Cason, chair; Cynthia Atherton, Ian Barrow, Tina Endicott, Michael Katz, Seth Kroop '02, Wasim Rahman '02, Walid Saleh)

RE: Recommendations for Middle East Studies

DATE: April 25, 2002

Responding to your invitation in December 2001 to recommend ways to strengthen Middle East Studies (MES) at Middlebury, we submit this report. Over the last several months, we have met on a nearly weekly basis to discuss possible initiatives in the area. We also met with chairs of 5 departments where we considered the possibility of recommending new appointments to strengthen Middle East Studies and compared our own programs with those at the "with which" schools and considered the study abroad possibilities for students in the region.

This report is divided into four sections. First, we discuss the general need to strengthen MES at Middlebury. The second section briefly notes what is currently available at Middlebury in MES. The third section outlines our recommendations in the short to medium term. The final section considers the ways in which MES might fit into our broader IS curriculum, particularly in the context of attempting to expand the visibility of MES and other area programs at Middlebury.

THE CASE FOR MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

Since the committee was formed in the first place, we assume that there is recognition that MES should be strengthened at Middlebury. Nevertheless, we think it is useful to consider in a bit more detail why MES should be a priority. As numerous recent analyses have noted, the United States was woefully unprepared for the sudden need for knowledge about the Middle East following the attacks of September 11. It is not as though this was the first crisis in the Middle East to demand more detailed knowledge—the oil crisis of 1973, the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979-80, and the Gulf War of 1990-91 were certainly events that might have served as a wake up call to inspire more knowledge about the region. Alas, Middlebury was not unlike other "with-which" schools, and did not add significant resources to study this area. The exception to this general trend would be Middlebury's addition of a summer school in Arabic in 1982, and in this, Middlebury certainly does stand out.

We know, as well, that augmenting area programs at Middlebury and elsewhere tends to respond to international trends. Russian and Soviet Studies programs were founded early in the Cold War; Latin American studies program flourished after the Cuban Revolution. Government and other resources flowed into such programs, and there is every reason to expect the same will occur with the Middle East in our current situation. Middlebury, because of its historic strengths

in international and area studies and language instruction, is quite well placed to a) immediately take advantage of such funding opportunities, and b) be a very attractive candidate for funding agencies, since we will be seen as quite capable of "absorbing" new financial and curricular resources.

We also know that academic and international trends change, and there is no way to predict what will be popular with students 10 or 20 years from now. We also recognize that other area studies programs would like to make a claim for resources in the next round of faculty expansion. Therefore, what we propose here is both bold and modest. It is bold in that we suggest that Middlebury add Arabic during the regular year and strengthen MES in other areas, but it is modest in the sense that what we propose here, at least initially, will only make MES as strong as some of the other "minor" areas in our curriculum such as African Studies and South Asian Studies when it comes to regional courses outside of languages. For the time being, the committee is not recommending the establishment of a full-fledged MES track within IS, although that could be a medium-term goal if enrollments in Arabic and area courses is strong and there is a clear demand for such a track.

Middle East Studies in Middlebury's curriculum

Currently, our offerings in MES are somewhat scattered in the curriculum, with greatest focus in the Religion department and the Geography department. There are 3 or 4 courses per year relating to ME topics in Religion. Among the courses listed in the catalog are RE150, The Islamic Tradition; RE250, Shi'a Islam; RE251, Islamic Mysticism; RE253, Islam in America; RE255, Islam in the Modern World; RE/WG259, Women in Islam; clearly, the replacement for Walid Saleh will develop his or her own lineup of courses beyond RE150. There is one course per year in Geography, GG220—Geopolitics of the Middle East. In addition, there are occasional offerings in History of Art and Architecture that would be relevant to MES—HA204—Islamic Art, last offered Spring 1998, and there are courses in the history department that have some Middle East content. Those include: HI101, In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great, which deals with the ancient Persian Empire for one third of the course; HI102, History Across Frontiers: The Eurasian World in the Age of Empires, deals with the Ottomans for one third of the course; and HI233, Nomads of Eurasia, deals briefly with nomads in the Middle East.

Recommendations for strenghthening Middle East Studies

In considering what could be offered to strengthen MES, the committee considered both language (Arabic) and non-language positions. As will become clear below, expanding the offerings in MES could take a variety of forms, and in an ideal world with unlimited resources, we would add all of the positions outlined here in the near future. Given limited resources, however, and assuming there is a decision to expand MES at Middlebury, we recommend the following:

- The addition of a position devoted to Arabic instruction
- The addition of one social science line dedicated to the study of the Middle East
- The addition of one humanities line dedicated to the study of the Middle East

We should note at the outset that the committee as a whole was most focused on achieving a balance among language, social sciences, and humanities, and had spirited discussions about what positions should be added if we were to strengthen MES. Indeed, on the committee, one could find advocates for each of the positions we outline below as being most important, and compelling arguments can be marshaled for each of the positions. Instead of choosing among them, we decided on a general recommendation for the addition of resources in each of the three major areas. We would also recommend that departments consider joint appointments—for example, one could envision a joint political science/economics/IPE appointment—that would serve different departments and MES as well.

We also concluded that the sine qua non of any strengthening of MES should be the addition of Arabic. It would have the largest short and long-term effects on MES, and would certainly be the most visible initiative in the curriculum. We think that given Middlebury's historic strength in languages, we would be particularly well-placed to take such an initiative. It is also well-timed, given recent events, and we think external funders may be very interested in the initiative as well. Thus, under any scenario of strengthening MES, we would recommend adding Arabic during the academic year. We also think, however, that to sustain interest in the Middle East, and to respond to what we anticipate will be increasing student demand for courses on the region—particularly if Arabic is added to the curriculum—the addition of non-language positions will be essential. In addition, any decision to expand our ME faculty should carefully consider the appropriate sequencing of new positions (i.e., whether language should come before more content courses or vice versa).

What we do in this section is lay out the ways in which each potential position would strengthen MES, both broadly and in terms of possible course offerings. We spend the most time on the addition of Arabic, since it is the most specific of our recommendations.

Arabic

The committee recommends a gradual introduction of Modern Standard Arabic if we choose to strengthen MES. This may be resisted by some who would argue for an all-or-nothing approach to the introduction of new languages, but we think it would be more prudent to start gradually, for two main reasons.

First, starting gradually would allow us to test the waters, and to see if there really is a strong demand for Arabic among our students. Plenty of anecdotal evidence indicates that there would be such a demand, but until we offer Arabic during the academic year, we do not know how many students will enroll in Arabic classes. Indeed, the ups and downs of other language departments give us a good reason to be careful in the introduction of a new language, given the fact that we do not, as a College, have unlimited resources. Although Arabic is the world's sixth most spoken language, it is not widely studied in the United States (the MLA reports that in 1998, 5060 undergraduates studied Arabic, and 445 graduate students studied Arabic). These numbers are likely to expand significantly in coming years given recent political events, and since Middlebury already attracts so many students who are interested in languages, we think that classes in Arabic will have substantial enrollments. But we cannot know that for sure.

Second, since we already have a summer school that teaches 5 levels of Arabic, we should be creative about integrating the summer schools into our regular language offerings to give students who are interested in the Middle East and Arabic as much opportunity for language study as possible. Indeed, we already have a head start on many of our peer institutions because of our summer school, so we should leverage this advantage.

Therefore, we recommend the addition of one new tenure-track line in Arabic. We do not recommend, at this point, the creation of a department of Arabic or a major in Arabic. We think that this new tenure-track position should be located within an existing department (Religion or Classics, for example; this important detail would need to be worked out). Three years after this initial appointment, we would recommend a review of the course enrollment data and, if it appears that the demand for Arabic is robust and is likely to be strong in the future, we would recommend the addition of a second position in Arabic.

We would also recommend that this new instructor teach a 2 or 3 term sequence of introductory Arabic courses each year, and that students who wanted to continue their study of Arabic (and possibly study abroad) should continue during the summer school for second year Arabic. The new faculty member should also teach (beginning in the second year of his/her appointment) at least one course in third year Arabic. We should note, as well, that this way of introducing new languages at Middlebury corresponds to how we are introducing Portuguese, with an expected tight linkage between academic year and summer sessions, for at least one summer. Some other languages at Middlebury have a greater tie-in with the summer sessions (Chinese, for example), and we think that this connection should be emphasized and strengthened if we add Arabic during the academic year.

If we go forward with an initiative in Arabic, we also recommend investigating—with Starr funds—study abroad possibilities for our students who would take the language. The current political environment is dicey, to say the least, but it is not beyond the realm of possibility to imagine study abroad opportunities in places such as Morocco, Egypt, or Jordan, and we should look into what is feasible in these locales.

Finally, we should note what our competition is doing in Arabic. Two of our competitor schools (Smith and Wesleyan) offer first year Arabic. One offers two years of Arabic (Wellesley). Only two offer full programs in Arabic (Tufts and Amherst, the latter through the Five Colleges program). Simply put, there is not much else out there when it comes to undergraduate Arabic instruction, and we would be well placed to move in this direction quickly.

Economics

In economics, there is a rich tradition in Islamic economics, and there are also many development and resource economists working on the Middle East that could be good candidates for a position in our economics department. The economics department would also be quite interested in adding a position in the Middle East, assuming that they receive a Latin Americanist replacement following Tom Kelly's resignation.

The department would also look for other fields within such a position, and Sunder Ramaswamy told our committee that the department would like to hire a Middle Eastern specialist who also had strengths in econometrics and/or statistics, since they need additional faculty resources to teach such courses. He also noted that unlike most economics departments, Middlebury's department has a very strong area studies focus. The department would like to be able to hire someone who would have good language skills, but it probably does not want to limit its pool by insisting on high language expertise in any job advertisement. The department would also advertise abroad for this position, which would broaden the pool.

Potential Courses:

Economic Development in the Middle East
Islamic Economics
Resource Economics (with an emphasis on the political economy of oil)

History

The one major area of the world where the history department lacks an expert is in the Middle East, and the department would be very interested in such a position. In this sense, history would view its role in MES as one of a "service department," providing the "temporal scaffolding" for other departments and MES in particular. This is, indeed, how it operates with the other area studies programs, all of which have at least one historian dedicated to work on the region.

The history department would emphasize the need for an historian who has strong language skills, although they would not want to restrict the position to any particular language. The precise specialization for an historian could be open, though there would be an expectation that any historian of the Middle East would teach broad-based courses that would have wide appeal.

Potential Courses:

Formation of the Islamic World
Modern Middle East History
National Movements and Decolonization in the Middle East

Political Science

The political science department has been thinking about adding a specialist in the Middle East for a long period of time, going back nearly a decade. For a variety of reasons it has not hired a Middle Eastern specialist, but would be quite interested in doing so.

There is also a clearly illustrated demand for Middle East offerings in political science. In particular, the course being offered this semester by visiting associate professor Gregory Gause (from UVM)—International Politics of the Middle East—received enormous enrollment pressure. 60 students tried to sign up for the course (there were 30 slots available), and in the end, 41 students enrolled in the class. In addition, 2 recent IS seminars (Religion and Conflict

and Jihad v. McWorld) that have included political scientists as faculty and have had some focus on the Middle East have had heavy enrollments.

The specialization of a political scientist in the Middle East could be open. In addition, a political scientist would be expected to have strong language skills, since anyone occupying such a position would be expected to have done field work in the language in the ME.

Potential Courses:

International Politics of the Middle East
Politics of Islamic Fundamentalism
North African and Middle Eastern Politics

Sociology/Anthropology

Both the committee and the S/A department is in agreement that if they add a position in the Middle East, it would be in Anthropology. The variety of things that could be accomplished with an anthropologist expert in the area are impressive, and include mass media, religion and modes of power, organization of tribes and clans, the role of history, story and myth, and the relationship of state to local cultures, to name just a few. There is clearly a wide range of possibilities for such a position, and since culture is where much of the action is in the Middle East, an anthropologist would be well-placed to make a strong contribution to MES.

Given the nature of field work in anthropology, the expectation of high language ability would be built into such a position. We would not want to necessarily limit such language specialization to just Arabic, and the language specialization could be left open.

Potential Courses:

Media and Modernity in the Middle East
Women and Islam
Urbanization and Mobility in the Middle East

MIDDLE EAST STUDIES AND THE IS CURRICULUM

Given what it takes to establish a major track within the IS major (a complement of language courses and a sufficient range of regional courses in multiple departments), the committee does not recommend the establishment of a major track in MES in the near term. This might be a medium term goal, and if there is a clearly demonstrated demand for such a track, it might very well emerge. In the near term, however, the recommendations here would not put MES in the position of being able to offer a major track on par with our other major tracks.

However, the committee does think that in the context of strengthening MES, we should raise the visibility of both MES and other parts of our area studies curriculum that have lacked the visibility that our current faculty resources could give them. In particular, we think that it would be advisable to raise the profile of other areas in the college curriculum that are not represented

by full-fledged tracks within the IS major but in fact have substantial curricular strength. In particular, we recommend establishing and/or highlighting minors in three areas: Middle East Studies, African Studies, and South Asian Studies. The recommendations outlined here would allow for the establishment of a MES minor. We also recognize that because of language, MES is the one minor track that could eventually emerge as a major track within IS.

If we create or highlight these three minors, we would envision an IS setup in which there are certain areas of the world where we have full-fledged tracks (East Asia, Europe, Latin America, and Russia and Eastern Europe) and other areas where we have a minor track (Africa, Middle East, and South Asia). Recognizing that we will not be able to "cover the globe" with depth in every area, we would like to highlight the fact that we do cover large swaths of it already with our course offerings and faculty. Students could, for example, major in a traditional discipline and minor in one of these area tracks and gain a solid area studies—and in some cases, linguistic—training.

Consequently, we would strongly recommend that the International Studies Steering Committee, in consultation with the International Committee, develop such an integrated development plan for international studies at Middlebury.